

## **Dogs on Conservation Land Effective Control Sub-Committee Report**

**Sub-Committee members:** Greg Higgins, Chip Poutasse, and Judy Zaunbrecher

**Meetings:** September 25 and October 10, 2017

**Purpose of sub-committee:** Recommend effective control for dogs on Town owned Conservation Land.

### **Findings:**

- Dog Etiquette Rules have been drafted with significant input from the dog owning community. This list is attached to the report. If the NRC adopts these Rules, they would be used in the education initiative (i.e., posted at trailheads, posted on the Town website, sent to all dog owners when dog licenses are issued and renewed, etc.)
- Effective control when dogs are off leash should include both sight and voice control standards. Even though some dogs may be under effective voice control even when out of sight, the owner does not know what the dog is up to or whether another person has encountered the dog.
- There is no uniform definition of effective control used throughout the dog training community. Additionally, it is not reasonable to expect even a well-trained dog to respond 100% of the time to the owners command. Distractions, breed, and dog's age can influence how well a dog will respond to its owner's commands. An experienced dog trainer indicated that 80 to 85% recall in the real world situation would be considered good passing benchmark for a trained dog. Some dogs could have better recall. The younger the dog, the lower the response rate will likely be. The experienced dog trainer indicated most dogs less than 18 months old should not be considered under effective control.
- Establishing effective control of a dog requires continual training of the dog by the owner. This training needs to include real world situations the dog will encounter. It can take 6 months to 2 years to train a dog and the training must be ongoing even after the owner has established effective control.
- The question of how far a dog should be from its owner and still be under effective control was not settled. The issues the NRC needs to consider in regards to this include:
  - The terrain and line of sight on a given trail. For instance, if a trail is heavily wooded with many blind curves, a dog 20 or 30 feet ahead of the owner may encounter another walker before the owner can respond with a voice command.
  - Can the natural resource values of the Conservation Land be protected if dogs are off the trail? Considerations should be given to erosion control, unwanted paths being established by dogs off trail, the presence of sensitive habitats such as vernal pools and bird nesting sites, and removal of dog waste in the woods.

- It is the responsibility of the owner to know their dog's capabilities. As the Concord dog officer cited in her report to the NRC on July 12, there is a significant number of dog owners who are not good judges of this. Others in the community have cited observations consistent with the dog officers report.
- Many attendees thought that setting clear dog etiquette rules, clearly communicating them, and educating dog owners on them would be a critical part if dogs are allowed off leash on Conservation Land.
- The concept of requiring permits for dogs to be off leash on Conservation Lands was discussed. Attached is a proposal for such a program.
- Others will scrutinize how well the dog-owning community endorses and enforces effective control standards. This provides an opportunity for responsible dog owners to lead by example.
- It should be noted, non-dog owners are skeptical about how well dog owners can or will control their dogs. Even a minority of dogs not under control will lead people who do not want to interact with dogs to avoid places where dogs are off leash.

### **Recommendations**

- The NRC should adopt the Dog Etiquette Rules.
- The NRC should adopt the standard that for areas where dogs are allowed off leash, they must be under both sight and voice control. The NRC should recognize that well trained dogs off leash will likely not be under 100% control and that young dogs (<18 months old) are probably still being trained and even less likely to be under consistent control. The standard should include that the dog obeys to the owner's signal on the first command and is in sight at all times.
  - The distance criteria for effective control in off leash Conservation Land areas needs to be considered in conjunction with the terrain of the land, natural resource values being protected, and the presence of handicapped accessible trails.
- The NRC should adopt the regulation that people and dogs must stay on marked trails. No "bush whacking" is permitted unless specifically posted.
- The Town should not take responsibility for establishing and maintaining an Effective Control Tag program. However, if credible third parties want to do so, then the NRC or DNR must review the certification criteria to ensure it is consistent with Regulations for Dogs on Conservation Land.

### **Resources Required**

- If Dog Etiquette Rules are adopted, there will be costs to distribute these. These costs are outlined in the Education Sub-committee report.
- Enforcement costs have not been considered.

### **Drawbacks**

- Adherence to any standards adopted is uncertain. In particular, adherence by dog owners who do not have a good understanding of their dog's capabilities, dog owners from out of town, and dog owners who

fundamentally disagree with the regulations has been raised as an issue, but no clear solution has been proposed.

- Aggressive enforcement of the current regulations has also been proposed. This takes Town resources and no plan has been developed or agreed to immediately increase enforcement activity on Conservation Land by either the DNR or other Town agencies.